

The Platoon Raid: High-Intensity Urban Operations Ch

by Captain Gregory G. Lee

Current publications on conducting raids in a combat zone assume the environment to be a high-intensity conflict against a determined enemy in prepared positions. U.S. Army Field Manual (FM) 3-06.11, Combined Arms Operations in Urban Terrain, defines precision conditions in urban operations (UO) as, "either the threat is thoroughly mixed with noncombatants or political considerations require the use of combat power to be significantly more restrictive than UO under high-intensity conditions." As the major combat phase of Operation Iraqi Freedom ended and the 1st Armor Division relieved the 3d Infantry Division in Baghdad, the attitude toward high-intensity raids had to change.

High-intensity raids would only serve to undermine support for coalition forces by harming innocent bystanders and causing collateral damage. The terms "soft raid" or "knock and search" imply that there is a culture of non-violence in a combat zone, but due to the unpredictable nature of the enemy and his ability to disguise himself as a civilian, the mission shifts from high-intensity urban operations to precision UO for raid operations. If necessary, precision UO can transition immediately to high-intensity UO on contact with hostile combatants. Additionally, U.S. Army UO doctrine is often tailored to combat in western-style urban areas; Iraqi dwellings are often significantly different from their western counterparts and present different tacti-



alging to Precision Urban Operations

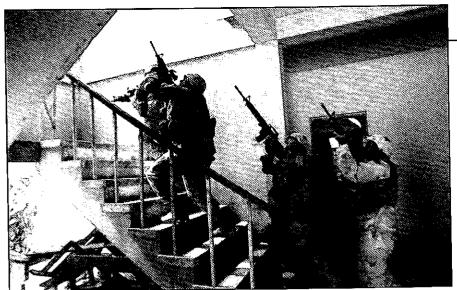
cal problems to the soldier. This article discusses some of the tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) that our unit developed to fill the gap between doctrine and its application, while transitioning from high-intensity raids to precision raids, trying to best account for and protect the indigenous customs of the local population.

Urban Iraqi Dwellings

There are two main types of dwellings in the Baghdad area, family houses and apartment buildings. The first type of dwelling can be either a single home with its own boundaries or a row house that shares adjoining walls with its neighbors. Apartment

buildings tend to be between four and eight stories with varying interior floor plans.

Single homes in urban areas are usually multistory buildings. The most significant difference from western-style homes is that rooms are rarely constructed off a hallway. Instead, there is usually one main room that contains doorways leading to several adjoining rooms, which have doors to other rooms or connect back to the main room, creating a complicated security problem for soldiers conducting room-by-room clearing. This is mostly attributed to the need to conserve space in the home for living use (hallways are not space available for living) and



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the prominent Islamic culture, which protects the sanctity of the home by usually having a receiving room directly inside the main entrance to the house. This allows the women to cover themselves appropriately out of sight, while the men receive visitors. Often and not unusually, visitors will be graciously received by their hosts without seeing a woman.

Homes often contain more than one family or an extended family; consequently, they tend to be both crowded and cluttered. Several individuals may occupy a small 10x12 foot room

and sleep on the floor. Large pieces of furniture are rare, with the exception being wardrobes since most Iraqi homes do not have built-in closets. Bathrooms are very small and sparsely furnished with squat-toilets and a large water basin or container. Stairways usually do not have a wall to the inside, but have a landing at the top overlooking the stairs below, and have at least one turn.

Iraqi homes tend to have flat roofs with access from the inside and are often used for storage and sleeping in hot weather. Since most Iraqi homes are built very close together, adjoining roofs make excellent escape routes. Both single homes and row houses are usually surrounded by a concrete, stone, or brick wall between six and eight feet tall with a gate for foot traffic and autos. With their maze-like construction and the need to secure routes surrounding stairs, single-family dwellings most often are cleared from the ground floor up. (The exception is when assaulting personnel can gain access to the roof from the outside.)

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Platoon Precision Raid Operations

Platoons, regardless of organization, are capable of successfully conducting raids; however, commanders must accept some risk when assigning raid missions to smaller platoons, such as tank platoons. FM 3-06.11 dictates that platoon offensive operations should be task organized into an assault element, support element, and a breaching element. "The purpose of the assault element is to kill, capture, or force the withdrawal of the enemy from an urban objective and to seize key terrain."2 FM 3-06.11 continues to define the duties of the support element as "isolating the objective building with direct and indirect fires" and "suppressing enemy weapons systems" and "containing a reserve for the assault element."3 The breach element provides mobility for the assault element throughout the operation and may be a separate element or be assigned from either the assault or support elements. Although doctrine recommends a generic task organization, it fails to task the separate elements that are necessary for command and control.

The Raid Team

Raids on dwellings can be conducted by a platoon with specialized support provided by the company or task force. The following task organization is recommended:

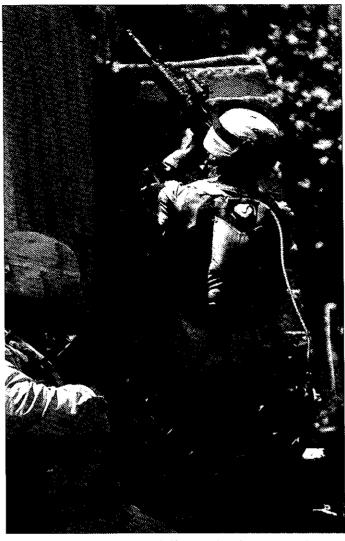
Outer cordon. Support element: 3 to 5 vehicles. The outer cordon secures the target area by blocking streets and alleys or other natural choke points around the target building to prevent interference from external forces and escape of targeted personnel from the area. The soldiers scan adjoining buildings for snipers, provide suppressive fire with crew-served weapons if resistance is encountered and the building must be assaulted, and use optics and spotlights to detect personnel attempting to escape via adjoining rooftops.

Inner cordon/yard team. Support element: 4 to 6 personnel. This team scales the outer wall (if present) and secures yard or area outside of target building. They identify and assist in breaching the gate and secure prisoners as they exit the target building. The yard team must also provide suppressive fires with individual weapons if resistance is encountered by the clearing team. After the building is secure, they gather and inventory intelligence items seized during search.

Clearing team. Assault element: 4 personnel. This team consists of the basic four-man stack. Their duties include entering and clearing the building while neutralizing threats. The clearing team initially secures/neutralizes building occupants for handover to the follow-on EPW team and assists in the search for items of intelligence value.

Breach/EPW team. Support element with breach tasking: 4 to 8 personnel. The aptly named team breaches all obstacles, to include the outer gate and the building's entrance. They assist the clearing team by securing and advancing the foothold inside the house as it is cleared, while securing, searching, and evacuating EPWs to the EPW holding area. This is the alternate clearing team if the primary clearing team receives casualties. The breach/EPW team can also evacuate friendly casualties to the casualty collection point (CCP) (normally where initial entry or foothold was made), if the primary clearing team cannot evacuate itself. Lastly, they search for and secure items of intelligence value.

Command and control (C2) team. Support element: platoon leader and crew, platoon sergeant and crew, interpreter, and medic. The platoon leader directs and coordinates the efforts of all teams, initiates evacuation of the building through the use of an interpreter, initiates the assault on the building by the clearing team, conducts initial on-site interrogations of the EPWs,



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and identifies targeted personnel. Throughout the operation, he receives and passes reports to and from higher headquarters and controls the interpreter to prevent exposing this valuable asset. During the search phase, the platoon leader may identify items of intelligence value.

The platoon sergeant also receives and passes reports to and from higher headquarters, supervises and controls the CCP, medic, and evacuation vehicle, and conducts casualty evacuation and combat service support (CSS) resupply of supplies, equipment, and ammunition.

The platoon leader and platoon sergeant crews provide mounted security with crew-served weapons at the front of buildings for suppression of enemy weapons systems, and if necessary, assist in the conduct of casualty evacuation or CSS resupply of the soldiers inside the building.

Task Force Support

The task force must provide assets not organic to the platoon: an on-site medic (usually through standard operating procedure),



"If the platoon leader elects to set at an attack position, he may also choose to dismount his clearing and breach/EPW teams to reconnoiter and secure the target building via dismounted avenues of approach. The reconnaissance should focus on the following: the presence and activity of civilians on the battlefield (COBs) and enemy guards or lookouts surrounding the target building; whether or not the target building has lights/electricity; the location of entry points through the outer wall and into the building, and the assets required to breach them; the presence of dogs in the yard; and signs of human activity in the target building."

an interpreter to accompany the raiding team, transportation for EPWs and seized items, and a task force quick reaction force. Depending on the distance or size of the operation, the task force may wish to establish a forward aid station (FAS) or consolidated ambulance exchange point (AXP).

Sample Sequence of Events

FM 3-06.11 states when conducting an attack, the platoon must "isolate the objective, enter the building (secure a foothold), and clear the building (room by room, floor by floor)." The following sequence of events demonstrates how a typical precision raid would unfold in the Baghdad area of operations. The planning and preparation phases are omitted in the interest of brevity, but would follow doctrinal troop leading procedures. Also, certain steps may be omitted from the raid at the platoon leader's discretion or as necessary due to mission, enemy, terrain, troops, time, and civilians (METT-TC).

Platoon sets at attack position. The platoon leader may elect to have the platoon set at an attack position several bocks from the target building. While this affords the platoon leader greater flexibility to deploy his force in stages and synchronize his raid with other units, it also increases the risk that the raiding party will be detected and the target personnel will have the opportunity to escape or resist. If tracked vehicles are included in the raiding party, the attack position must be sufficiently distant from the target building to avoid detection by sound signature.

Clearing and breach/EPW teams conduct dismounted infiltration. If the platoon leader elects to set at an attack position, he may also choose to dismount his clearing and breach/EPW teams to reconnoiter and secure the target building via dismounted avenues of approach. The reconnaissance should focus on the following: the presence and activity of civilians on the battlefield (COBs) and enemy guards or lookouts surrounding the target building; whether or not the target building has lights/electricity; the location of entry points through the outer wall and into the building, and the assets required to breach them; the presence of dogs in the yard; and signs of human activity in the target building. All of these factors can influence the raiding

party before reaching the target building, causing a gambit of problems, possibly allowing the target to escape.

Mounted element moves to target building. The mounted element moves rapidly to surround the target building. Cordon vehicles occupy positions that block or observe key avenues of approach and escape routes from the target house. The order of march should account for vehicle positioning around the cordon, not section integrity, to achieve surprise and gain a foothold in the target building before the enemy can react. Dismounted security is immediately established by both the assault and the support elements.

Yard team secures yard and inner cordon. Once the outer cordon is established, the yard team sets the inner cordon. If the gate cannot be opened from the outside, the yard team should scale the outer wall (a vehicle pulled close to the wall will expedite this). The yard team immediately secures the yard, and then moves to open at least one gate. If

the gate cannot easily be opened from the inside, the breach/EPW team selects and breaches an opening. Having an open gate is necessary for easy evacuation of casualties and allows for the winch of a HMMWV or tow chain to assist in breaching a point of entry in the target building. While the yard team secures the yard, the clearing team and breach/EPW team stack separately along the outside of the wall near the designated entry point.

Building evacuation is initiated. Using the interpreter, the platoon leader initiates the evacuation of the target building. A siren is sounded to wake the buildings occupants, while an announcement is made through a loudspeaker, demanding all occupants of the target building drop their weapons and come out with their hands in the air within five minutes. Similar announcements are made every minute and a countdown is initiated at 15 seconds. As target personnel exit the building, they are secured by members of the yard team and escorted to the gate for handover to the EPW team. The EPW team secures and searches all male personnel, while females and children are moved to a separate holding area.

Females and children must be searched, but with proper regard to local cultural customs. A female soldier for a pat-down is most desirable, but electronic wands work well if the unit is all male. With the aid of an interpreter, the platoon leader immediately begins on-site interrogations with the aim of determining the identity of all males, location of weapons in the target building, location of personal identification and documents, location of keys to all vehicles parked at the target property, and other information as specified by the higher unit. Two members of the breach/EPW team remain as guards for the male detainees (females and children should be watched by members of the C2 team). The interpreter must also reassure the family that no harm will come to anyone outside the building.

Clearing and breach/EPW team enter building. Before the occupants are awakened by the siren and countdown, the clearing and EPW teams move to the building's entry point and the clearing team immediately "stacks" the door. After the countdown, and if the building has been evacuated, the teams use the

doorway through which the occupants exited, and the breach/ EPW team "stacks" behind the clearing team. If the building has not been evacuated, the teams select a point of entry and the breach team forces entry.

The clearing team enters the building and establishes a foothold using proper room-clearing procedures. When the foothold is secure, two members of the breach/EPW team are called in. If enemy personnel have been encountered, they are immediately secured, searched, and evacuated by the breach/EPW team. The handover must be performed rapidly to maintain the clearing team's momentum. The clearing team moves quickly, clearing from room to room. Members of the breach/EPW team advance the foothold by trailing the clearing team and securing EPWs, breaching heavy doors and obstacles, and securing the exit route to the CCP. If a stairwell is located, members of the breach/EPW team assist in securing it, while the clearing team clears the remainder of the floor.

Once the ground floor is secure, the clearing team ascends the stairs using proper building clearing procedures and begins clearing the second floor. They continue this process until all floors are clear, including the roof. The clearing team leader reports as each floor is completed and when the entire building is secure. Team leaders must keep the platoon leader informed of the location of team members inside the house to prevent fratricide from the cordon elements.

Target building is searched. Once the target building is secure, the clearing and breach/EPW teams split into two-man search teams under the control of the breach/EPW team leader. Searchers look for items of intelligence value as determined by higher headquarters, and as items are seized, members of the yard team remove them from the building for inventory. Two copies of the inventory list are made, one of which serves as a receipt to the property's owner, the other as a record for the S2.

Once a ground-floor room has been searched, the females and children may be moved indoors and guarded. Members of the yard team assist in searching vehicles parked at the target property.

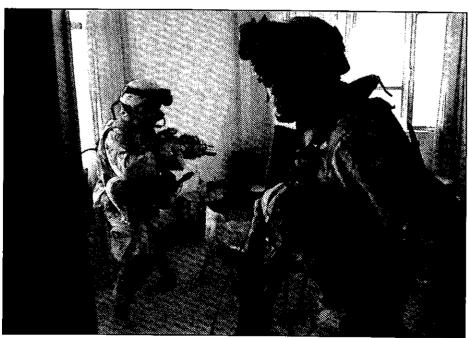
Evacuating detainees. The platoon leader calls for the vehicle to transport detainees, which may be integrated into the outer cordon or set at the attack position. The detainees are silenced, blindfolded, segregated (if necessary), and loaded onto the transport vehicle (members of breach/EPW team may accompany detainees as guards or, if the task force provides guards, may rejoin their team). It is important that the transport vehicle not depart the objective until the search of the target house is complete. The platoon leader continues to interrogate the detainees until he determines that there is no more information to gain about the contents of the house. Once the search is complete and all items of intelligence value are loaded, the transport may depart for the task force jail.

Reconsolidation and exfiltration. Once all detainees and items of intelligence value have been removed from the target site and the search completed, all personnel exit the building, except for one soldier who remains to guard the females and children. After all personnel and equipment are accounted for, the guard moves to his vehicle, all personnel mount their vehicles, and the platoon exfiltrates the target area.

Equipment Requirements

To successfully complete the tasks of isolating, clearing, securing, and searching the target building and its occupants, certain items of team and individual equipment are required, while other items are desirable (but not critical). Much of the equipment is organic to the platoon, while others must be provided by the task force or specifically ordered for conduct of UO and stability and reconstruction operations.

Team equipment. Communications between the team and its leadership is crucial to the smooth, rapid execution of the raid. Squad dismount radios are preferred, but other types of personal radios are acceptable. Each team leader, the platoon leader, and the platoon sergeant should be so equipped. The team must have breaching tools, such as sledgehammers, battering ram, and heavy bolt cutters, carried on the platoon sergeant's vehicle (or another vehicle in the inner cordon) and accessible as needed. Flex-cuffs, blindfolds, and 2-foot strips of engineer tape (for gags) should also be carried by the breach/EPW team. Additionally, sandbags and boxes are useful for transporting items seized during the search, and clipboards with carbon paper will speed the inventory and receipt process. Spotlights or other portable battery-powered lights are useful in searching buildings that do not have electricity, and they can be used to illuminate the surrounding area. Thermal sights, when available, should be used by the outer cordon to observe the rooftops for fleeing personnel, while other personnel in the outer cordon, yard team, and C2 team should use night-vision goggles (NVGs) to observe their sectors.



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Individual equipment — clearing team. Buildings are inherently cramped spaces for soldiers and narrow doorways, furniture, and other obstacles often inhibit movement. The clearing team, in particular, must remove all unnecessary equipment to ensure that they do not become caught or snagged while moving through the narrow confines of a dwelling. Such items as "butt" packs, NVG mounts, bayonets, and canteens should be removed. Ideally, the soldier should wear only his Kevlar helmet and body armor with magazine/grenade and first aid pouches attached. Needed supplies, such as water and additional ammunition, should be carried by follow-on teams. Rifle slings should be removed and replaced with snap-rings or commercially available "hands-free" slings. NVGs must not be used when clearing buildings due to the loss of depth perception; narrow field of view caused by the NVGs will make smooth, rapid movement through buildings difficult. Instead, high-intensity flashlights should be mounted on weapons, gaining the added benefit of blinding a target that is already adapted to the dark (since most raids occur at night) and on familiar ground. Because of the potential for falls while moving rapidly through dark, cluttered rooms, clearing teams should wear kneepads, elbow pads, and gloves. Ballistic goggles prevent eye injuries caused by spalling when weapons are fired indoors.

Individual equipment — breach/EPW team. Like the clearing team, the breach/EPW team should remove all unnecessary equipment. In addition to the items mentioned above, the breach/EPW team should carry one or two breach tools, such as a hooligan bar and sledgehammer, and a small supply of flex-cuffs and blindfolds. The breach/EPW team should not attempt to carry heavy breaching equipment; the platoon sergeant or yard team will bring these forward as needed.

Using a checklist, such as the one in Figure 1, will greatly assist leaders in preparing soldiers for various situations they may encounter during raids.

Room and Building Clearing Procedures

The following paragraphs outline procedures that have been successfully employed in previous raids. For a full discussion of room clearing, refer to FM 3-06.11.4

The complex layout of Iraqi homes makes it necessary that the clearing team be led from the front. While it is not always necessary that the first man in the stack be the team leader, it is essential that an experienced decisionmaker lead the assault. The leader, as he moves through and clears the room, must not only identify noncombatants and engage targets, but also identify additional entrances to the room and immediately determine what resources are needed to secure all entrances/exits. Civilian casualties will only breed resentment and fuel hostilities toward coalition forces, therefore, the first man into a room must be an experienced decisionmaker, preferably a SGT or SSG. This allows the lead man to decide instantly who is or is not a threat without resorting to communications for guidance.

In our experience, the rooms that lead from the main room are what most UO operators consider "short" rooms. They are small in area and only require two soldiers to clear. Initially, two personnel will enter the room. The first man will follow the path of least resistance (usually straight across the door) and move to the nearest corner. The second man will proceed in the opposite direction. Their entry should be as simultaneous and as rapid as possible. Both soldiers clear as they move; swinging their muzzles from the corner they are approaching, across the room, to the opposite (diagonal) corner. Noncombatants are ordered to lie facedown on the floor and enemy personnel are engaged

PRECOMBAT INSPECTION CHECKLIST

IN

NDIVIDUAL EQUIPMENT
Mission knowledge Non-essential equipment removed IBA with SAPI plates
Magazine/grenade pouches First aid pouch w/casualty feeder card Rifle sling removed/hands-free sling present Flashlight mounted w/fresh batteries Kneepads worn
Elbow pads worn Gloves worn Gloves worn/clean and serviceable
Close combat optic (M68) wheelt patiented Squad dismount radios present/radio check complete (team leaders, platoon leader, platoon sergeant)
BREACH/EPW TEAM EQUIPMENT
Hooligan bar Sledgehammer (x 2) Battering ram (large and small if possible) Bolt cutters, heavy Wire cutters
Flex cuffs/large zip strips
Sandbags Engineer tape (2-foot strips, for gags) Blindfolds
SEARCH EQUIPMENT
 Boxes Sandbags Shoe tags Clipboard w/paper and carbon paper; pens
Clipboard wipaper and carbon paper, per Latex gloves Large flashlights w/charged batteries (Maglite D-cell preferred) Pry-bar
 Small stepladder Electronic metal detector wand (for searching females and children)
CORDON, YARD and C2 TEAM EQUIPMENT Thermal sights operational w/batteries or vehicle power Crew served weapons w/night sights mounted and operational NVGs operational w/fresh batteries
Spotlights with fresh/charged batteries
CSS ASSETS
 Medic w/aid bag present Interpreter present and briefed w/script for evacuation announcement
Loudspeaker w/siren All soldiers know location of CCP Bulk class III and water present for resupply Link-up points for CASEVAC and detainee evacuation established/briefed
Figure 1

with accurate shots (controlled pairs). If the room is irregularly shaped or contains additional entrances, the leader gives the order, "Next man in, right (or left)." The third man replies, "Coming in, right (or left)," and enters the room in the ordered direction. The leader verbally identifies the threat to be secured and directs the third man to a position from which he can best cover

his assigned sector. If the leader determines that a security threat still exists, he orders additional personnel into the room until the room is secure. Personnel outside the room (unemployed clearing team members or breach/EPW team personnel) cover unsecured areas in the direction of travel and secure exit routes.

If noncombatants or enemy personnel are encountered, two personnel from the breach/EPW team are called in as soon as the room is secure. They immediately assume responsibility for captured, wounded, or dead enemy forces; all living enemy and noncombatants are secured and evacuated. The clearing team immediately moves to the next unsecured room and prepares to enter.

If any member of the clearing team becomes a casualty, the breach/EPW team immediately takes the lead and becomes the clearing team. This maintains the momentum of the operation and permits the rapid evacuation of the casualty. Casualty evacuation and the handover of team responsibilities will not occur until the room is secure. Once the room is secure, the casualty's team members render aid and evacuate the casualty to the CCP, where the platoon sergeant and the medic are prepared to receive him.

Considering the labyrinth of rooms on the first floor, an unguarded or bypassed stairwell could allow enemy to infiltrate behind the clearing team and split the raiding forces inside the house. Therefore, when a stairwell is located, it must be treated as an unsecured area. Two soldiers from the breach/EPW team are detailed to secure the stairway and the stairway is bypassed until the ground floor is secure.

Training and Rehearsals

Speed, surprise, and violence of action are the three most important factors governing success, as they minimize the enemy's ability to offer resistance and quickly overwhelm those who choose to resist. To achieve speed, the raiding party must constantly and methodically train and rehearse, resulting in smooth, seamless execution. Surprise need not be complete, as entering at a time and location unsuspected by the enemy and then attacking rapidly through the building more than compensates for any surprise lost when the five-minute warning at the outset is given. Violence of action sows confusion among enemy personnel and discourages resistance.

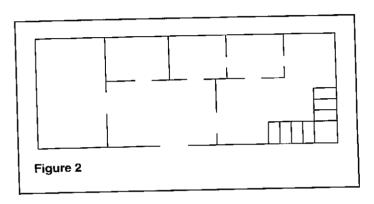
Importance of training and rehearsals. Because the procedures outlined in this article deviate from established U.S. Army doctrine, they are likely to conflict somewhat with how soldiers have been previously trained. Also, the execution of raids requires precision and teamwork surpassing that required for normal UO. Frequent, repetitive training will build precision and teamwork, while reinforcing the differences between high-intensity, precision, and surgical conditions in UO.

Maintaining team integrity. It is desirable for teams to be cross-trained on the responsibilities of other teams, and that teams are rotated through various duties of clearing team, cordon teams, breach/EPW teams, and C2 teams on successive operations. However, team integrity must be maintained. Soldiers must train and operate as part of a team to maintain consistency, so movement of personnel between teams should be avoided as much as possible. This develops flexibility in the platoon and yields more options for the platoon leader's planning.

Training techniques. Precision building clearing should be trained using the crawl-walk-run method. Teams begin by learning the basics of close quarters battle, then progress to clearing rooms. Training should be repetitive, like a football team prac-

ticing plays, with the emphasis placed on precision and smoothness. As training progresses, a variety of room sizes and shapes should be included, and a series of rooms representing a house should be cleared. Training may culminate with the inclusion of opposing forces personnel and noncombatant role players.

Training sites. Traditional Army UO training sites are not well suited to training for operations in Iraq, as they usually represent European-style architecture. A suitable training site must be constructed or improvised. The example at Figure 2 below represents the layout of a typical Iraqi home. Note the mazelike pattern of rooms, with one room containing doorways into several others, and the corner stairway with turn.



To respond to the noncontiguous combat environment in Iraq, while seeking to embrace the local customs, units must be able to transition seamlessly from surgical conditions to precision conditions to high-intensity conditions during operations. Leaders must continually revise operational and tactical procedures and train their soldiers to adapt to the ambiguous enemy threat. Leaders establish the restrictions through rules of engagement that determine whether operations occur under surgical, precision, or high-intensity conditions. Through planning and rehearsing, leaders can train soldiers to rapidly transition from one condition to another and still maintain the warrior edge when in contact with hostile forces. Battling complacency is the toughest fight for a leader on a battlefield. It is a leader's responsibility to prepare his soldiers for every situation they may encounter on the battlefield; wherever the battlefield, whatever the mission.



Notes

¹U.S. Army Field Manual (FM) 3-06.11, Combined Arms Operations in Urban Terrain, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC., 28 February 2002.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

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